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Cooley Owes $25.4M Judgment To NJ Biotech Co. Founder

By **Brian Steele**

Law360 (July 27, 2026, 7:23 PM EDT) -- A New Jersey state court on Monday entered a $25.4 million judgment against Cooley LLP after a jury found the multinational firm had committed malpractice in its representation of a biotech founder who said his own lawyers assisted in shoving him out of his company.

Superior Court Judge Douglas H. Hurd ordered Cooley to pay John Gregg $15.65 million in damages after a jury found in favor of the Symbiomix Therapeutics LLC founder in October 2025, holding that Cooley breached the standard of care and its fiduciary duties to its client. The order formally entered that judgment plus more than $5.57 million in interest and about $4.2 million in fees and expenses to attorneys with Mazie Slater Katz & Freeman LLC and the Howard Law Firm LLC.

In addition, the judge ordered that interest continue to accrue until the judgment is paid.

In his October 2017 complaint in the Superior Court of Mercer County, Gregg said Cooley did not disclose that it had conflicts of interest when he sought legal advice about a multimillion-dollar investment from two venture capital firms. Gregg was trying to bring a women's health treatment called secnidazole to the United States and Cooley stood to earn more than $500,000 if the deal closed, he alleged.

According to a Monday statement from Gregg's legal team, Cooley senior partners wrote internally that the investment terms were "terribly abusive" and the businessman was "getting absolutely hosed," but Gregg was unaware of that assessment before he signed.

"At the time, Cooley not only represented John and Symbiomix, but also represented at least one of the venture capital firms in unrelated transactions," the statement said.

The venture capital firms — OrbiMed Advisors and Fidelity Biosciences — came to control Symbiomix's board of directors, which fired him within months. Gregg blamed Cooley for language in his employment agreement that allowed his termination without cause and for letting the firms repurchase 28% of his company equity for one penny per share, totaling $6,670 for shares that were worth more than $1 million and continued to grow in value.

Ultimately, the venture capital firms sold Symbiomix to Lupin Inc. for $150 million, but Gregg's legal team said he received nothing.

Gregg claimed more than $108 million in damages, alleging tortious misconduct and violations of the New Jersey Rules of Professional Conduct.

Cooley has around 1,400 lawyers across 19 offices in the United States, Asia and Europe, according to its website. Its headquarters are in Palo Alto, California.

In a statement Monday, Cooley told Law360 that it "strongly" disagrees with the verdict and plans to appeal.

"The evidence presented throughout this matter demonstrated that our attorneys acted with professionalism, diligence and integrity," the statement said. "We stand firmly behind their conduct and look forward to a fair and thorough review by the appellate court."

The law firm on Oct. 30 asked the court to overturn the jury's decision, arguing Gregg was repeatedly informed that Cooley represented the company and not him. Judge Hurd denied the motion Feb. 17.

Cooley said when Gregg signed the 2013 separation agreement and the equity repurchase agreement, he knowingly released all claims against the firm, "including those that were unknown, undisclosed and unsuspected."

Cooley argued Gregg received legal counseling about the agreements from Howard Law Firm LLC attorneys and a third lawyer, and he was aware that Cooley represented the company.

According to Cooley, Gregg received severance pay, a $291,000 bonus and an additional year of vesting shares in exchange for signing the separation agreement.

Gregg's opposition filing was sealed, but he contended in his complaint that he had an attorney-client relationship with the firm based on advice it gave him in connection with his intellectual property. He said Cooley advised him to assign the intellectual property to the company for no compensation and without any clawback provisions.

Gregg also sued four individual attorneys: Christian Plaza, Michael Tuscan, Keith Ranta and David Walsh. The jury found that Plaza and Gregg had no attorney-client relationship, and Gregg reached deals to drop his case against the other individual defendants in 2024 and 2025, according to the judge's order.

An attorney for Gregg, David Freeman of Mazie Slater Katz & Freeman LLC, told Law360 on Monday that Gregg decided not to pursue his claims against Tuscan, Ranta and Walsh and did not receive any payout from them.

Freeman said Gregg "basically had his entire company taken away from him," and the judge's decision to enter judgment "was a step in getting justice" for him.

Freeman's co-counsel, David Howard of the Howard Law Firm, told Law360 the decision "vindicates" his client.

"This was a long, nine-year legal battle," Howard said. "Cooley fought us tooth and nail every step of the way. In many ways, this was a genuine David and Goliath battle."

Gregg is represented by David Freeman, David Mazie and Sam Wildman of Mazie Slater Katz & Freeman LLC and David Howard and Michael Lotus of the Howard Law Firm LLC.

Cooley, Plaza, Ranta and Walsh are represented by Brian J. Molloy, Daniel J. Kluska and Allison Ens of Wilentz Goldman & Spitzer PA and Joseph P. McMonigle of Long & Levit LLP.

The case is Gregg v. Cooley LLP et al., case number MER-L-2332-17, in the Superior Court of New Jersey, County of Mercer.

--Editing by Janice Carter Brown.

Update: This article has been updated to clarify the role of attorneys who advised Gregg prior to trial.
